

Aqours' Summer
Splash 編

公野櫻子

イラスト+伊能津/清瀬赤目

ラブライブ!
School idol diary
+ サンシャイン!!



Chika / Riko / Kanan / Dia / You / Yoshiko / Hanamaru / Mari / Ruby

Love Live! Sunshine!! School Idol Diary

Aqours' Sea Side Diary

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12 - Kanan Matsuura / Dia Kurosawa / Mari Ohara



The Start of Summer [by Kanan]

"Aah, it's so hot! If I stay out any longer, I'm gonna get boiled into fresh, *al-dente* pasta!"

We're returning from a shopping run.

Mari does a little dance, fanning herself with her hands as she talks.
That's just like Mari. She's always in high spirits.
Then she stops and looks up to the sky.
My gaze follows hers upwards.

The long, seaside road continues all the way to the school.
Beyond the heated asphalt and guard rails, there's the raucous sea,
bright sunlight, and interminably vast blue sky.
It's a July afternoon, and summer break's almost here.
The sound of waves and cicadas provide BGM for the beach. It's bright
and quiet here.

As if to break through the solitude, Mari shouts towards the sun in the
distance, "Aaahh, I wish I had some delicious macaroni and cheese!"

Macaroni and cheese... Is that American cooking, the taste of home
that Mari's always talking about?

Maybe the thought of fresh pasta brought it to her mind.
I stifle a laugh and turn my head back down to street level.
Oh.

I notice the paper lanterns hung along the street.
Small red-and-white striped lanterns.
They dot the streets of Uchiura that separate the blue waters from the
green mountains, inviting people in.

"They've already begun preparing," I mutter. Mari, looking puzzled,
turns to look at me.

"The festival lanterns. They always do it the week before summer
vacation. When I see the lanterns going all the way to the shrine, that's

when it finally feels like summer to me."

After my explanation, Mari looks back up at the lanterns above her. She focuses her gaze and starts to read them out loud.

"Kurosawa Construction..."

Each of the lanterns have the names of shops, companies, and sometimes people written on them in brush writing.

Those must be the shops and people who donated to fund the festival.

The more you contribute, the more lanterns you get.

Long story short, it's kinda like they're advertising for their sponsors as thanks, I guess?

Well, everyone running a store here is basically obligated to donate to the festival. Even my grandpa has a lantern to his name.

Somewhere out there, there should be a lantern with the words "Uchiura Diving Center" written on it, although it's a bit too simple of a name.

Hehe ♪

But, of course, the name Mari reads belongs to the Aqours members Dia and Ruby.

As we look around, we see a few others.

"Kurosawa Realty, Kurosawa Industries, Office Kurosawa, Kurosawa *Ryoutei*, oh, and Kurosawa Fisheries, the original ♪ " Mari admires the lanterns in a singsong voice. "The Kurosawa family sure does a lot of stuff♥"

"Yeah, they've been the *amimoto* here for a long time."

A foreigner like Mari might not grasp the exact nuance of that, though.

But, I don't really have any other way to explain it...

"I get it. So, the Kurosawas are basically the dons of the village ♪ Wow, they're just like a mafia!" Mari says, dancing some more.

Mafia...

"Th... They're not bad people or anything. I don't think that's quite right."

As I talk, I remember how I used to catch sight of Dia at the festival.

Back then, I never even imagined we'd be in Aqours together.

Dia was just someone who'd been my classmate for a while.

There were stalls set up along the street.

A small stage for the Bon dance was set up in the parking lot of the fishery co-op building.

The lanterns burned orange in the darkness of night.

Some people nearby were prepping the fireworks on the beach.

All the kids were with their best friends, enjoying the festival.

Meanwhile, Dia, dressed in a yukata, was looking dignified.

She had her lips pressed together as she sat alone at the seat of honor, a pipe chair under the white tent in front of the fishery co-op building.

There were only adults around her.

There were the owners of large stores in Uchiura, and the head of the neighborhood association, oh, and the one bowing his head is the principal of the elementary school.

The Bon dance had already begun, and the usual *Tankou Bushi* was playing.

As the adults in the tent got drunker, their voices grew louder.

Amidst the red-faced adults making merry at the festival, she was alone.

Dia sat in the far back, looking off into the distance.

I wondered why a kid like her would be in there, but for some strange reason, I accepted that as the reality, and didn't call out to her.

She belonged over there, and I belonged over here.

I thought that was just natural.

I didn't dislike her or anything. If we got put in the same group in elementary school, we talked like normal. We were normal friends.

But, now that I think about it, there was just something different about her. I'm sure Dia knew that too.

No, in fact, she probably realized it long before I ever did.

It wasn't because I was an outdoorsy type, always running and rolling around on the beach, and she was a lady who took tea ceremony and koto lessons and got to ride around in a black car with a chauffeur.

It was because, even if we smiled together, and sat in the same classes, there was an invisibly thin, but impregnable fence between us.

As I think back to what I saw back then, I still can't figure out what to say. Thankful that Dia isn't here, I re-adjust my grip on our shopping bags and decide to hurry along.

Inside the bags, I'm carrying fabric for our petticoats, construction paper and masking tape for the stage, and refreshments for the rest of the team.

"Come on, Mari! Afternoon classes are ending soon. Can we hurry up? We don't have time to stop and look at the lanterns today. It's Chika's fault that- I mean, it's because of Chika that we get to perform at the festival, so we need to get prepared, and quick."

"Okay ♪ But don't worry! The sun's still high in the sky, and summer afternoons are long. Let's just take it slow and try not to break a sweat ♡"

As usual, Mari dances some more, with half her body hanging past the guard rail and over the water.

It's like she's always got music in her head, even when she's not wearing earphones.

Even if she wants to take it slow, I think we'd get sweatier if we stayed out here in the open for too long.

This is a bit of a bother.

"If the drinks warm up, Yocchan's gonna start complaining about how unlucky she is, and how this place is hell and stuff."

Mari responds with loud laughter.

"Oh no! That would make us devils, envoys from hell ♪ " Mari says, happily. Then, she twirls and suddenly starts walking away at a faster pace.

She acts carefree, but she's actually a nice girl.

"Wait for me!"



I chase after her.

As I run, I look up at the lanterns one last time.

Names belonging to the Kurosawa Group sway above my head.

Oh.

I realized something.

Now that I think about it.

If Aqours is performing at the summer festival, then does that mean Dia will be absent from her VIP seat at the white tent this year?

I recall Dia's expressionless face as she sat in her neat yukata.

On a day for children to smile and enjoy the festival, only Dia had the face of an adult.

I think she must have been there to represent her parents, or some other reason that required her to attend.

Can she really skip that to join Aqours's performance...?



Dia was in the broadcasting room.

Here at Uranohoshi Girls' Academy, our student council president is responsible for reading the announcements, too.

As always, she's seated in front of the broadcasting machine, with its countless switches, and she's checking some documents.

I quietly lean in through the half-open door.

"Uh, Dia, do you have a minute?" I ask, making sure to keep my voice down.

I need to make sure the machine's not switched on, 'cause a while back, Chika said she had to talk to Dia, and just barged into the room. Then, the entire school got to listen over the intercom as she went into this **huge** spiel trying to convince Dia to join Aqours.

I wouldn't want to go through that embarrassment, hehe.

Dia only glances at me before coolly returning to her work.

"Do you need something?" she asks with her back turned.

Yep, pretty cool.

"Well, Aqours is meeting for practice after class today. Can you make it? We need to decide some things for our performance at the festival, too."

"Oh, sorry. I have dance lessons today, so I can't stay long after school today. I'll have to ask Ruby for the details later, so could you let her know? I already told her I can't go today, and there's nothing I'm particularly adamant about, so go ahead and make all the decisions you need without me."

"Okay..."

Silence.

The stack of papers rustle in Dia's hand.

"Are you, uh, busy?" I ask hesitatingly, and Dia's hands stop.

She raises her head and turns to me.

"Is there something else you need?"

Dia's gaze never wavers.

It's direct... and even though she's just looking at me, it's so forceful that my heart jumps in my chest.

"Uh, not really..." I get nervous for some reason, but I say it anyway.

"Uh, the third-years had the elective period free today, so Mari and I went shopping."

Dia tilts her head slightly.

"Then, on the way back, there were these paper lanterns hung all the way down the highway along the beach. You know, for the festival."

Dia nods in understanding.

"So, they've begun preparations already? Now that you mention it, we had a lot of visitors in our house last week. It must have been for some meeting related to that. Aah, things are about to get noisy again.. I'm sorry to everyone who's looking forward to the festival, but the fishery cooperative's summer festival is a bit of a bother to me. I know I can only

bear with it because my father is the head of the union, but it's annoying when there are so many visitors to the house and I have to greet them all." Dia says, then shakes her head, as if there's something she's trying to shake off. "But, this year..."

"This year, yes, we have Aqours's mini-concert." She whispers, looking just a little bit uneasy.

That's what I was expecting.

"Dia, are you really going to be able to show up for the festival concert?" I ask. Dia's eyes grow wide, and rarely enough, she's at a loss for words.

She looks hesitant.

"I've seen you before. During the festival, you're always sitting at the, uh, 'VIP seat' in the white tent, right?"

"VIP Seat? That's... not really how it is..." Dia stutters and stumbles.

"Mari and I saw lanterns for Kurosawa Construction, Kurosawa Fisheries, and a lot more with your name on it."

That speaks volumes about just who Dia is.

The old memories of Dia's stoic face on festival night float into my mind again.

The way she just froze up confirms to me that she's got some important duty again this year.

"I know that just being a member of Aqours takes a lot of work for you. It might be better to put family matters first on the night of the festival, right?"

I try my best not to put pressure on Dia as I ask.

At the same time, I think about what we'll do if Dia can't join in.

We've never done this before. Can we really perform while we're one member short?

We might have to choose a song where the formation isn't as important. The stage probably won't be that big, so we'll simplify the dance...

But would that make Ruby, who's already our most accident-prone member, even more nervous, and cause her to mess up? Hey, wait a minute.

If Dia can't join because of family matters, then wouldn't the same go for Ruby?

The realization jolts me, but at same time...

Huh? I'm pretty sure I've never seen Ruby in that tent with Dia, though...

In fact, I'm pretty sure I remember seeing her bawling after ripping her



goldfish scoop on her first attempt.

Then, Dia cuts my thoughts off.

"Don't worry, I'll be going," she says plainly.

Well, yeah, she's said that before, but...

"Is it really going to be okay for you?"

She doesn't have to force herself to come. I press her again to make sure.

Since Dia has such a strong sense of responsibility, I already expected her to say that, but...

My family kinda runs a diving shop, and as part of a family business, I just kinda know how it is for her.

Actually, the same goes for Chika, too. When your family runs a business, there's just times when you have to put family first, right?

Someone from a salaryman's family wouldn't understand, and sometimes I do feel like going, *why me?* But still...

I think that there are some selfish desires that you can never bring yourself to say.

I know the family business supports me, and I know the struggles my parents go through.

And, sometimes, when you force your selfishness too hard, then you can't get your way when you really need it, and you lose even more of your freedom down the line.

Well, when it comes to me, I just have to cry and tell Grandpa that I'll work twice as hard next weekend to make up for the weekend I'm skipping. But, for the Kurosawa family, who has to deal with mayors of towns and cities, and other bigwigs from who-knows-where, that's on a completely different level from me.

But, regardless of my worries...

"I said I'd go, and that's what I'll do. Hehe. Am I really so untrustworthy?" Dia giggles as she talks.

"Ah, no, that's not what I meant..."

Of course I trust Dia.

She continues, "When I decided to join Aqours, I decided that I would fully accomplish whatever I had to do, no matter how idiotic it might seem, so you don't have to worry about me, okay? Even if..."

Idiotic, huh?

I laugh a little at how Dia can say those things completely unironically.

She's smart, and cool, but she's also serious about everything.

"Even if it's just a little summer festival for the town, I shall go on stage together with the rest of the team as a school idol. And, since I have the opportunity, I'll... get my father... to watch, too."

I feel like her voice was shaking a little at the end there.

But, okay.

As long as Dia says so, I'll trust her.

I smile at her and say, "Alright, then I'll let everyone know you're taking the day off. This summer festival concert came up pretty suddenly, but it's gonna be great to get together and dance ♪ Once we get that done, we can all go scoop goldfish and eat shaved ice together ♡ "

I flash a peace sign to her, and Dia smiles back.

A bright and refined smile, like a flower.

A while after leaving the broadcasting room, as I walk down the halls, I hear Dia's composed voice echoing from the speakers behind me.

"Attention, all students of Uranohoshi Girls' Academy, it's time for cleanup. Let us all once again give thanks to St. Maria, our guardian, as we clean our school."



The members of Aqours are gathered by the stage.

It's past 7 o'clock, and even the long summer day has been replaced by darkness now.

The tiny stars in the night sky and the waves of orange lanterns glow.

The stage for the Bon dance has been set up right in the middle of the Fishery Co-Op's large parking lot.

Next to that, there's a stage set up just for us. That's where Aqours is about to perform.

The sides of the stage are covered in red and white striped curtains. We're standing behind it, waiting for our turn.

Once the next song ends, the Bon dancers will take a 20 minute break before the next stage event.

We're already in costume, waiting to perform.

But, Dia isn't with us.

"Hey, where's Dia? Is she just late? Or did she get lost? The festival's so crowded today! Do you think I should go for her?" I hear Chika ask Ruby.

It seems Ruby hasn't noticed until now.

"Huh? That's strange. She told me she couldn't go to the festival together with me, so I should wait and meet up with her here. I thought she had student council work to do... Huh? Is she still not here? What happened to Sis?" Ruby says, looking around herself.

Something comes over me as I listen to her.

My eyes focus back onto the white tent at the end of the parking lot - the VIP zone for all the town's most important people.

"Yep... She's still in there," I whisper.

Mari overhears me. "Looking for Dia?"

Surprised, I turn around, nearly bumping into Mari, who's leaning over me.

"Ack, s-sorry... You noticed too, huh?" I accidentally yell.

"Shh. You don't let the others hear us and start worrying, do you?"

I hurriedly lower my voice. "You noticed Dia too, huh?"

"Well, you told me about it when we were looking at the lanterns. I already expected that Dia would try to do both, since she's got such a strong sense of responsibility, but I wasn't expecting her to get trapped in there."

We both look back at the chair under the white tent.

"Ooh, there she is! Looks like her dad's introducing her to everyone there. She must be his beloved successor, with that oh-so-beautiful face and big brain of hers♪" Mari says joyfully.

However...

"But, if his pride and joy were to suddenly run out, dress up in this school idol getup, and start singing and dancing on stage..."

"That might just make *Daddy* faint♪ Oh no! How could this happen to the *don* of the town's *mafia* ? ♥" Mari dances around playfully.

"Come on! Now is not the time for jokes!" I scold her, but I do acknowledge that if it's going to end up like that, it might be better just to perform with just the eight of us.

From the way she's acting, I'm guessing she hasn't told her family about Aqours. In that case, if she were to suddenly have her big coming-out here, her family might oppose it.

And then, of course...

I glance at Ruby. She's standing with Chika, both of them wondering where Dia is.

We'd be in for some trouble if we lost two members. What



should we do?

Then, Mari suddenly stands up.

She grabs me firmly by the wrist and starts walking off.

"It's now or never, Kanan! *Let's go !*"

Without any explanation, she drags me away.

She ignores the crowd staring at her, and walks right under the tent.

"Um, Father, I..."

"Ooh, there she is♥ Dia!"

It was at that moment that Dia stood up. Apparently she'd just decided to make her move then.

Her eyes widen in shock as she watches us barge in.

Standing next to her, even Dia's dad slightly withdraws in bewilderment.

Mari suddenly pitches a fastball at breakneck speed, as if she's not thinking of anything at all .

"Phew, I was wondering where you were, Dia♥ We're here to pick you up♪ We've gotta go perform at Aqours's show, after all♥♥" she says with a wink. "Oh, and good evening, *Mr. Kurosawa* . We're Dia's friends from school. I'm *Mari Ohara* , and this is..."

Mari suddenly turns to me.

Flustered by her sudden pass, I stammer, "Uh, I... I'm Kanan Matsuura! It's been a pleasure to attend school with Dia..." That's about as far as I get.

Mari continues, holding back laughter as she talks, "Well, Dia said she was going to enjoy the festival with us, but she was taking too long to show up, so we came to get her♪ Would you mind if we took her for a bit? You see, we're actually in this school idol group called Aqours, and Dia's one of our most popular members♪"

Mari just keeps going.

She doesn't seem to be aware that both me and Dia are frozen in shock.

"We're about to have a performance, too, so come see your precious Dia on stage, okay? She is just the cutest thing ever♥ If you think you love your daughter now, well, you're gonna love her even more once you see this! I guarantee it♪" She ends with a wink.

Judging by the look on Dia's dad's face, I can clearly tell he's wondering, Aqours? School idols? Most popular member?

At that moment...

Hehehehe♥



For some reason, I burst out into laughter too.

"All right, let's go, Dia. Ruby's waiting for us♥" I say.

Mari follows, "We're gonna rock this festival tonight! You all better be there to see us♪"

Waving her hand, she takes Dia's hand and leads her out of the tent.

I take Dia's other hand and walk her out, too. She's too shocked to say anything.

The three of us run to the stage, side by side.

We're back at the waiting area next to the stage.

"I was so worried, Sis!" Ruby cried as Dia hastily threw on the costume Ruby brought her.

Dia looks nervous as she dresses herself, but I hear a voice in my ear as she proceeds.

"Ugh, can you believe Mari!? What was she thinking!?"

She sounds uncharacteristically emotional.

Hehehe... I can definitely understand how she feels, though.

"Looks like you're in for a rough night once the performance is over," I say while fidgeting with Dia's skirt.

Dia finishes adjusting the cuffs of her knee socks and sharply lifts her head.

"You've got that right. And I was just about to say it myself, too! I thought he might not notice me with eight other people on the stage, and it would be best to deliver such a surprising announcement as this one softly and gradually..."

"Really? Normally, you get things over with right away, though..."

... So it wouldn't be like you to do that... But, maybe I shouldn't say that out loud?

But, Dia might be thinking the same thing, since she's blushing now.

"But, that doesn't matter anymore. What's done is done. I shall have to face the consequences, and force my father to accept Aqours!"

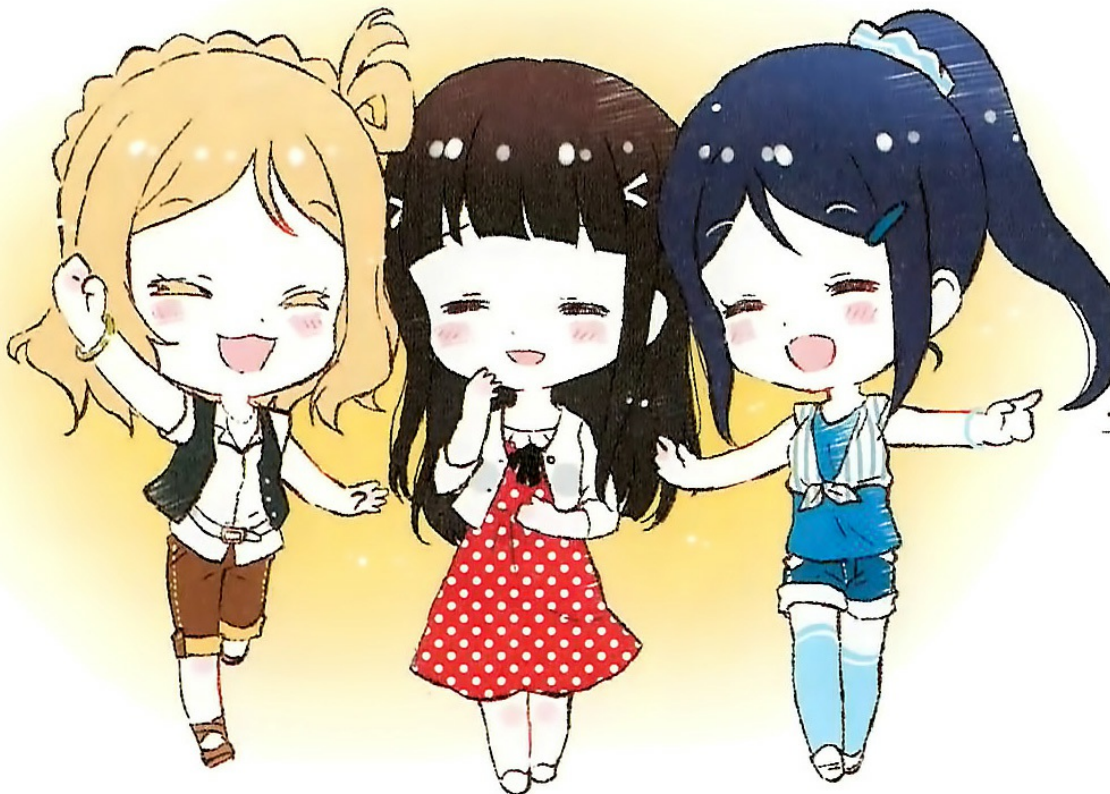
She clenches her fist.

"Don't worry, I never lied to them about this, and the rules of the Kurosawa family say that I'm allowed to do whatever I want as long as I'm keeping up with all my schoolwork, lessons, student council business, and chores. If I can't even convince my own family that Aqours is worth taking part in, then I'll never stand any chance of winning the Love Live!"

But, again, not even Dia can fully suppress the quivering in her voice at the end.

Mari calls out to us, "Kanan, Dia, it's time to go♥ *That's all right !* Let's get on stage!"

I turn to Dia and nod, and then Aqours walks into the orange spotlight.



11 - Chika Takami / Riko Sakurauchi / You Watanabe

An Oath Upon the Summer Sky, from The Stars of the Inlet☆ [by Chika]

The stars and the lanterns swaying in the air light up the stage in the



summer night.

We, the 9 members of Aqours, have danced our best.

At first, we were worried about whether anyone would be watching, but the moment we jumped on stage in our costumes, we heard the crowd going, “Oh, how cute♥♥”

By the time we reached the first chorus, we had calmed down a little, and seeing the reactions from the crowd, their clapping, and the kids singing along with us made us so happy♥♥

Aqours was setting fire to Uchiura that summer night.

The thought that people were starting to accept us as their local school idols was so exhilarating♥♥

That night, I was happy from the bottom of my heart that I'd started Aqours.



“Argh, what should we do!? Nobody’s signing up at all!”

I’m staying after school, in a classroom. The first semester’s just ended.

There’s three of us: Riko, You, and Me. I look at the sheet of paper on top of several desks pushed together. *Uchiura Fishery Co-Op – Now Recruiting Volunteers for Ura High’s Traditional Yosakoi Performance!!* Sigh.

“Gahhhhhh, what should we do!? I know hardly anyone ever signs up for this thing, but I didn’t think we’d come up completely empty!

Anyway, what we did was we put this blank sign-up sheet in the hallway, right under the announcement poster, so anyone who wanted could sign up. The deadline’s already passed, and horror of horrors, we’re still at zero!

“Maybe we should have offered candy or some other sort of reward?” I say.

You shakes her head no.

“But it was a pretty sad show last year, too, right? There was only whoever was in charge, and like 4-5 of her friends. Well, that’s to be expected. People just throw something together real fast for the sake of this yearly tradition. Chika, you didn’t participate last year either, did you?”

Urk, she got me there...

“B-But, well, it’s always busy at home during festivals and other events. I’ve gotta help out and stuff, so my parents don’t let me go out and play. It’s not easy sneaking past them to go to the festival, so I couldn’t sign up for the yosakoi.

“But you snuck out anyway, right?” Riko asks, her eyes thinned as she smiles a Buddha-like smile.

“Hah, hahahaha ♡ W-Well, yeah! I mean, it’s summer and all. There’s a lot of festivals over summer vacation, but the port festival is the one that kicks off the festival season! They’ve got candied apples, and then there’s also yakisoba, and cotton candy, and shaved ice, and I just...”



“I just wanna eat it all!” You joins in with me.

“But what about You?” Riko asks.

“I’m also busy over the summer, since I have diving practice, so I couldn’t join either. Still, everyone’s danced the yosakoi at every single festival ever since they were in elementary school, so we’re all bored of it by now. A lot of them have to help out at home, too. When the kids do the dance, it’s really cute, and they get so into it. Oh, actually, how about we recruit at the elementary school, then? I’m sure we’ll get a lot of kids! We did it all the time back when we were their age, right?”

“Yeah! And we’d always get these little candy sets when we were done ♡ You’re right! If we’d offered candy to the volunteers, this wouldn’t-“

As I cock my head and complain, Riko raises her voice, something she does very rarely.

“No! That’s not what we’re doing this for! And You, you need to stop it, too! We’re supposed to be representing Uranohoshi Girls’ Academy here, so what’s the point of recruiting elementary schoolers? Did you forget what event we’re supposed to be managing?”

“Sorry!” You and I bow our heads and apologize before breaking into laughter together.

Riko’s just so serious ♪

“Well, we’ve got no other choice now, so we’ll have to use our connections! How about we just get all the members of Aqours together for the dance? I mean, the stage would look too empty with just the three of us,” says You.

“I-I can’t do the yosakoi dance on stage if it’s just the three of us! That’s too embarrassing!” Riko’s voice suddenly becomes real quiet.



“Hm, the members of Aqours, huh?” I whisper to myself.

Then, I realize something.

“If we’re gonna do that, how about we dance to one of Aqours’s songs instead of the yosakoi?”

“Aqours’s songs?”

“And we’re going to do the yosakoi dance to that?”

You and Riko both look shocked.

I giggle, “No, no. We couldn’t possibly dance the yosakoi to Aqours’s songs. What I mean is, since we’ll have all nine of us together anyway, and nobody else volunteered, we could make things more exciting by doing a concert as Aqours instead ♡ It’ll be a good way to get our name out, too.”

A pretty good idea, if I do say so myself!

This is it!

We’ve gotta give it a shot ♪



“So, we ended up getting sent to the preschool, huh?” You asks, stony-faced.

Ugh...

It makes me feel a bit bad when she says it like that.

“Oh, well, I’m actually kinda excited ♡ I’ve never been to Uchiura’s preschool before, but You and Chika both went there, right?” Riko smiles gently.

“Y-Yeah! We did! And not just us two, either. Kanan, Ruby, Hanamaru, and Dia, they all went there, too ♪ ”

“And now we’re going back to our old preschool as ‘the singing girls,’” You nods her head in thought.

Yeah...

Actually, right after we discussed it together, I went to the staff room to propose that we perform as Aqours instead of doing the yosakoi, since that would let us gain some ground and act as advertisement.

Can you believe they said no to that!?

They told me Aqours was just a newly-formed school club, and it wasn't appropriate for a festival for the town because we don't have any recognition.

Come on!

We've all gotta start somewhere, don't we!?

Even the legendary school idols, μ's, had no audience at first!

Recognition is something you have to build up through various activities. If we're not allowed to participate in the festival, then we're never gonna get any recognition at all! They just don't understand! It's like the chicken and the egg! If Aqours can perform at the summer festival, we'll get everyone to know who we are!

After I stood in the hallway and pushed my idea long enough, the teacher smiled nervously and told me that if I wanted to do that, people of all ages, from kids to old ladies, would be going to the festival, so I needed to spend the time to get all of them to know us first.

Everyone already knows the yosakoi dance, so it's just right for everyone to sing together at the festival.

So, I told her, "In that case, we'll do our best to prepare so everyone can sing with us at the festival!"

Then, the teacher thought for a bit, and decided that might be better than a yosakoi that people threw together in one day ♥

So, we've split up into teams today to get everyone in Uchiura, whether they're young or old, to know who Aqours are. Yaaaay, clap clap clap ♪



“Ruby, Maru, and Yocchan are going to the old folks’ daycare center, right?” You asks me as we walk.

“Yep! Maru’s family runs the temple, so she knows a lot of the older people. And, the third-years just happen to have a dolphin show at the island today, so they’re planning on making more fans among the elementary schoolers today ♡ ”

“I’ve heard that elementary schoolers are getting into school idols too nowadays, so I’m sure it’ll go great!”

“And you can be sure they’ll be at the festival, too ♡ ”

Riko and You look at each other and nod.

“Yeah! And the second years – that’s us – are going to... ta-dah!”

Without even realizing it, we’d already reached our destination while we were talking. Uchiura’s First Preschool.

“Don’t let the name fool you, though. The Second Preschool shut down a while back,” I say, and Riko responds with a gentle smile.

“I’m sure it’s full of lively little kids, just like you ♡ ”

“Alright, let’s set off in hopes of making even one more fan of Aqours, so we can have a successful concert! Steady as she goes!” You shouts heartily as we step through the doors of the preschool.



“Hello and good morning, everyone! We’re singers, and we’re here to play with you!”

“Do you kids like to sing? We’re part of a team called Aqours, and...”

“Hey! Get back here! Don’t you guys wanna sing with us?”

We tried our best to teach the kids to sing, but...

Their response was...

“You’re lying! The singers on TV were prettier, and they sang by themselves!”

“Sing the lunchtime song!”

“They’re not singers! They’re monsters! Run away, guys! Leave this one to Kingman, the hero of justice!”

The preschool has a lot less discipline than I expected.

You and I thought we’d have enough stamina to keep up with the kids, but after running around for so long, we’re starting to feel worn out.

The more we chase, the more they run and scream. Somewhere down the line, it’s starting to feel like we’re playing a game of tag. Sometimes the kids fall down and start crying, and we take them to the swings and help comfort them, and then everyone starts playing outside. Next thing we know, we’re playing *red light, green light* ...

Well, I guess it’s fun. I’m enjoying it too.

The preschool teachers thanked us for coming, and all the kids were happy that we came...

But...

This isn't what we're here for!

I was hoping for, like, one of those things they show on TV sometimes. You know the type, right?

Some celebrity visits a preschool, and they show off their latest routines... Wait, huh? I think we're going for something different... Whatever!

I wanted the three of us to dance and sing together, and teach them Aqours's songs...

Once all the kids are too exhausted to play anymore, it's naptime.

After all that running about, everyone's ready to sleep. Some of them are starting to doze off already.

Oh man, it might be tough to put all these kids to sleep.

But then...

“♪ It's time to begin, all together now, smiling as we poke our cheeks...”

I hear a serene voice coming from the edge of the classroom.

I can tell all the kids are listening too.

“♪ It's time to begin, all together now, smiling as we snip our scissors...”

I remember this.

I probably heard the same song when I was little. It's the hand sign song.

“♪ It's time to begin, all together now, smiling like a kitty cat with three whiskers each...”

As the song goes on, the voices of the sleepy children get quieter and quieter.

Four and four make an octopus, splort!

And at the end...

We put our hands together, and everyone smiles. That's the end of the song. It's time for everyone to be quiet.



Next to me, I hear Riko softly whispering, “Okay, everyone, we’ll play some more after naptime ♥ Now, sleep until we’re back, like good little kids. ♥ ”

Like magic, the kids crawl into their futons, one by one.

Some of them are already asleep on the floor, hehe ♥

They look so innocent on the floor, with their puffy cheeks. It’s so cute ♪

You and I pick them up and tuck them into bed.

Unfortunately, we’re just gonna have to put up with being preschool volunteers for the day! The three of us share defeated smiles as we turn off the lights and leave the room.

We sit down beneath the tall beech tree in the schoolyard.

Riko’s the first to speak up.

“They were so cute!”

“You think so!?” You pouts. “Well, I guess they were, but they also gave us a ton of trouble!”

“Yeah, they were climbing all over you. Maybe even preschoolers can tell you’re built tough, huh? I’ve been running so much

today, I'm pooped! It's been so long since I played with kids, I might have gone overboard," I say.

"You were taking it pretty seriously. They were all having so much fun ♥ I wish I could run the way you two can. That would've made it even better for them," says Riko.

"Huh, I felt like they were just toying with us the whole time."

While You and I are exhausted, Riko seems to be extremely happy.

When I look at her, I remember the hand sign song.

Riko's clear, tender, and beautiful voice.

Kids really do see that side of her, huh?

The moment she started singing, everyone stopped to listen to her.

But when You and I try, they roar like monsters and pounce on us!

Hmph! It kinda stings, but I can understand.

Riko just has this aura of niceness.

She could just become a preschool teacher, if you ask me.

I get why the kids like her. She's nice, and she's cute, and she has a wonderful singing voice.

"Have you ever worked at a preschool before? It felt like you were in your element there."

"No, never. It's just that I've taken piano lessons, and, well, there's a lot of little kids there, too, and sometimes I have to look after them, right?"

Riko still seems really happy.

"You've been looking happy this whole time. You must like kids a lot, huh?" I say, and Riko smiles back at me.

"Yeah, maybe I do. They were all so full of energy, it rubbed off on me. They're all cheerful and energetic, like both of you. I feel better just when I'm with them. That's something you two have in common with them ♥ "

“Wha, you mean we’re no different from preschoolers!?”

“Hehe. That’s not what I mean...”

“Well, I guess we’ve got one-track minds, and we love eating, and me and Chika are guilty of serial napping!” You laughs.

Riko starts laughing too, “Today, I’d been wondering what your preschool was like, but when I saw those kids, it felt just like I met all of you when you were their age. It was a lot of fun ♥ I’m an only child, so I’ve never gone back to preschool before. When I was in Tokyo, I couldn’t just casually walk into a preschool like this.”

Now that she mentions it, that’s true.

If we didn’t all know each other, like we do in Uchiura, then a preschool wouldn’t agree to let some random high schoolers in.

“I’m really glad I got to come today, though! I didn’t know I liked kids so much, either. Hehe ♪ I’ve felt this way for a while, but it’s like I’ve been experiencing so many new things ever since I came to Uchiura, even though there’s so much more stuff in Tokyo. When I lived in Tokyo, I was only living the stereotypical high school life. I never imagined I’d become a school idol or a substitute preschool teacher.”



“Ooh, yeah, and if you’d stayed in Tokyo, you’d never be forced to clean the baths at a hot spring inn!” I laugh.

“Then, one of these days, I’ll let you experience a high dive! It’ll be your first time jumping from the tippy top of a 10-meter board and splashing into the water ♥ ” You jests.

“Eeek! No, anything but that!” Riko shivers, and we all laugh together.

Strangely enough, I can clearly feel each of Riko’s words resonating within me.

When I see Riko like this, I feel a strange sensation filling me.

And that’s because, right now, Riko’s feeling happy that she came to Uchiura, right?

She’s come from Tokyo, the land of plenty, to Uchiura, in the middle of nowhere. And, despite that, she’s far happier in Uchiura.

Well, this is just a hunch on my part, but...

Maybe there’s other girls like Riko out there?

People who’d rather relax in Uchiura, rather than live in big cities like Tokyo.

If there were one in ten... No, one out of a hundred, or even one out of a thousand...

Then there’s still a nonzero chance that Ura High could get more students, right?

Up until now, I thought that we were too depopulated, and we couldn’t ever stop the school from shutting down because there weren’t enough high schoolers here, so I’d given up.

But, I thought I couldn’t ever become a school idol, either, and here I am now.

So, maybe...

If there’s anyone else out there who can understand how awesome our school is...

Just maybe...

On that one-in-ten-thousand chance that the entire country sees us...
Maybe there will be a few people who will want to come to Ura High.
Still, that's only a dream, I suppose...
But, when I see Riko smiling so happily...
I feel like that might just happen.
So, I'll just have to believe.
And I'll keep on putting everything I've got into Aqours.
We're gonna keep working at it, and become famous, and then, maybe
we'll get more students!
That's what my true dream is.

Right now, the first step we have to take, is to make sure the concert at
the summer festival is a success, and make everyone in the town support
us.

So, once we're done here, we'll have to keep working for the rest of the
day!

I hope we'll be able to get everyone fired up on festival night!



12 – Yoshiko Tsushima / Hanamaru Kunikida / Ruby Kurosawa

The Timid Angel vs The Kind Demon ♪ [by



Yoshiko]

“What!? Come on, it’s gotta be demons!”

“No way, we’re idols so, we should do something cute and angelic...”

Maru’s trapped between the two of us, fidgeting as we argue.

“Oh, right. What do you think, Maru? Should we go with my idea and wear demonic black leather costumes...” I say.

“Or do you like my idea of pure, angelic costumes with wings?” says Ruby.

“You’re gonna be the tiebreaker vote. Now, what will it be!?”

“I... I don’t know! I think they’re both good ideas. I can’t decide!”

Maru doesn’t know what to do here.

Hm, I was worried this would happen.

It's the post-exam break, just before summer vacation.

Dia's ordered all of us to finish our homework before the next break.

The three of us first-years gathered at the Kunikida house to do just that.

Well, I'm the type that finishes my summer homework right away, actually, so I wasn't too worried about it.

But, the problem is Ruby.

It seems she's fallen victim to Dia's decree that nobody will be allowed to go to practice before finishing their homework.



Hehe ♥

Dia's seriously so over-protective, isn't she?

She must love Ruby so much, she can't help it.

This is the sort of thing that makes people hate you, but she doesn't care. She'll do it anyway, just for Ruby ♥

Still, I do feel sorry for Ruby for having such a responsible big sister, so I decided I'd do homework with her.

Maru, the bookworm, is on language arts, I'm on math, and Ruby is on English. It goes faster if you divvy up the work, right?

And so, we're all doing homework together.

When you get three cute high-school girls together, it's inevitable that they'd start goofing off and talking about some nonsense ♪

Before we knew it, we'd veered away from discussing homework, and instead we're talking about Aqours's next costumes now.

Ruby says she's wanted to wear an angel-themed costume for a long time, and of course, I'm pushing for a demon-themed one.

After all, I'm an actual demon, a fallen angel, right?

Wouldn't it be a huge contradiction if I wore an angel costume?

It's not something I can really explain when I think about it.

When I'm wearing normal clothes, I can just say I'm disguising myself as a human ♪

But an angel costume would be...

Reverting to my past form?

My inconceivable return to heaven?

It just feels... wrong.

Gah. I think I kinda understand what it feels like for those celebs who make up a stage persona without thinking it through.

They start out doing it because it's the trendy thing to do, but eventually, everything comes together to make a huge, complicated mess.

It's so annoying...

No, wait, I'm an actual demon, so that's got nothing to do with me!

Ahem! Cough, cough, cough!



“So, why do you want to be an angel so badly, anyway? Like, I’ll admit you’re a good fit for the sweet, fluffy style, but idol costumes are generally pretty fluffy anyway. Don’t you ever get tired of that? I feel like a cool, black, leather and lace costume would be more unique,” I ask Ruby, who’s sitting across the table from me.

“Because... I’m scared.”

I didn’t expect that reply from here.

“Scared?”

“Yeah.

“Of demonic costumes?”

“Yeah. Of course, I know I shouldn’t be afraid of clothes, but I’m still a little bit scared. I start worrying, what if I actually become a demon when I wear it?”

“...”

I’m at a loss of words.

She’s, uh... got a very active imagination.

Maru chimes in, “Ruby’s always been really timid.”



Yeah, I knew that. But, still.

“Uh, can I check something?”

I stare into Ruby’s moistened eyes.

“You know I’m, like, an actual demon, right?”

“Yeah.”

Ruby shivers and nods.

“You’re okay with that?”

“Yeah...”

“You’re not scared of me?”

“Nope. After all, you’re just Yocchan. I’m not scared to be with you.”

Hm, as a genuine demon, I’m not sure how I should feel about that.

“Um, to tell the truth, I do get a little bit scared, actually. But, I know I shouldn’t be scared, or else I’d feel bad for you, Yocchan.”

Uh, what?

Now I’m even less sure of how I should feel.

I guess it’s true that even if I’m a real demon, the way people deal with that can get complicated.

Oh well ♥

“Okay, so you’ve got demons, fierce dogs, and men. Those are the things you’re afraid of, right? And then...” I start.

Ruby cuts me off, counting off on her fingers as she goes, “ghosts, *youkai*, UFOs, cryptids, and spicy food...”

“Woah! You must have a hard time surviving summer vacation! Actually, that covers everything you’d find in a test of courage, doesn’t it?”

Ruby twitches the moment she hears the words “test of courage” come out of my mouth.

Agh, she’s showing severe symptoms.

“What a waste. Maru lives in this fancy temple and everything. I was hoping we could all get together for a test of courage this summer.”

Ruby twitches and shivers even more.

Maru nervously says, “I don’t think that’s a good idea. I hear that in the past, some middle-schoolers were messing around and decided to do a test of courage here, and then, during the witching hour, the ghost of a fallen warrior with a noose around his neck showed up...”

“Aaaaahhh! Don’t just start talking about that so suddenly!” I shout. And...

“Eeeeeek! No! No! Maru, don’t ever talk about that!” Ruby shouts at the same time.

I blush a little.

Oh, Ruby’s face is totally red, though.

I quietly ask Maru, “Uh, Maru, do you mean you’ve never done a test of courage before?”

Maru’s face turns pink with embarrassment, and says, “W-well, I was born in this temple, so I’ve done a few tests of courage. When

my cousins and relatives get together, they always want to do it.”

Maru smiles as she talks.

“Okay, then. So, we can discuss costumes some other time. We’ll need to work it out with the rest of the group. Are we okay with that?”

“Yeah, but, if we really go with demons, I just hope it won’t be anything too scary.”

“Don’t worry, I hear you. You can trust me on this, ‘cause I’m an actual demon,” I proudly say to Ruby, as I glance in Maru’s direction.

She’s still smiling gently, as she always is.

Apparently, Maru had the most guts out of the three of us.



Who knew?

Noticing that the conversation’s reached a stopping point, Maru stands up, saying, “I’m gonna go get some barley tea from the storage room.”

“Alright. There’s only three pages of math left, so I’ll concentrate and finish it off.”

I say, turning to look across the table. “And it looks like you’re about to finish vocab, too, Ruby! If we finish it up quick, we might be able to think of some more costume ideas.”

“Yeah,” Ruby responds, nodding briskly.

Once I look at Ruby’s face to make sure she’s calmed down...

Though, there’s no reason why a demon should care about such things, I think.

Maru’s left the large guest room in the temple.

The two of us remain in the room, seated across from each other and writing away with our mechanical pencils as the diagonal rays of sunshine and incessant chirping of cicadas spill through the opening in the door and envelop us.

Oh, it looks like we’ll have a warm summer this year.

This is the first time I’ve spent a summer vacation with friends.

Maybe...

My bad luck is letting up a bit, and I’m getting luckier.

In that case, maybe I could abandon the demonic costume and go with the angelic costume?

Hehe. At any rate,

Now that I’m in Aqours...

I think I’ll be able to avoid boredom this summer.

